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SPINS A WEB

A BOOK ABOUT SPIDERS



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We're always going on strange field trips in Ms. Frizzle's class. The other night, the Friz took us all to a drive-in movie. It was an old science fiction movie about a giant praying mantis. There was no one in the drive-in but us.

According to my research,
Stand by Your Mantis
came out in 1953.

And the critics
probably said, "Get
the exterminator!"



The movie was kind of funny, but Phoebe wasn't enjoying it. She thought it was full of mistakes about insects.

"There's no such thing as a fifty-foot praying mantis," Phoebe said, pointing at the screen. "And if there were, you would trap it instead of trying to destroy it."

Carlos wasn't enjoying the movie, either. "Insects aren't my favorite thing in the world," he explained.



Just then, a spider crawled onto Carlos's seat. He jumped up. "What I *really* hate are spiders!" he yelled.

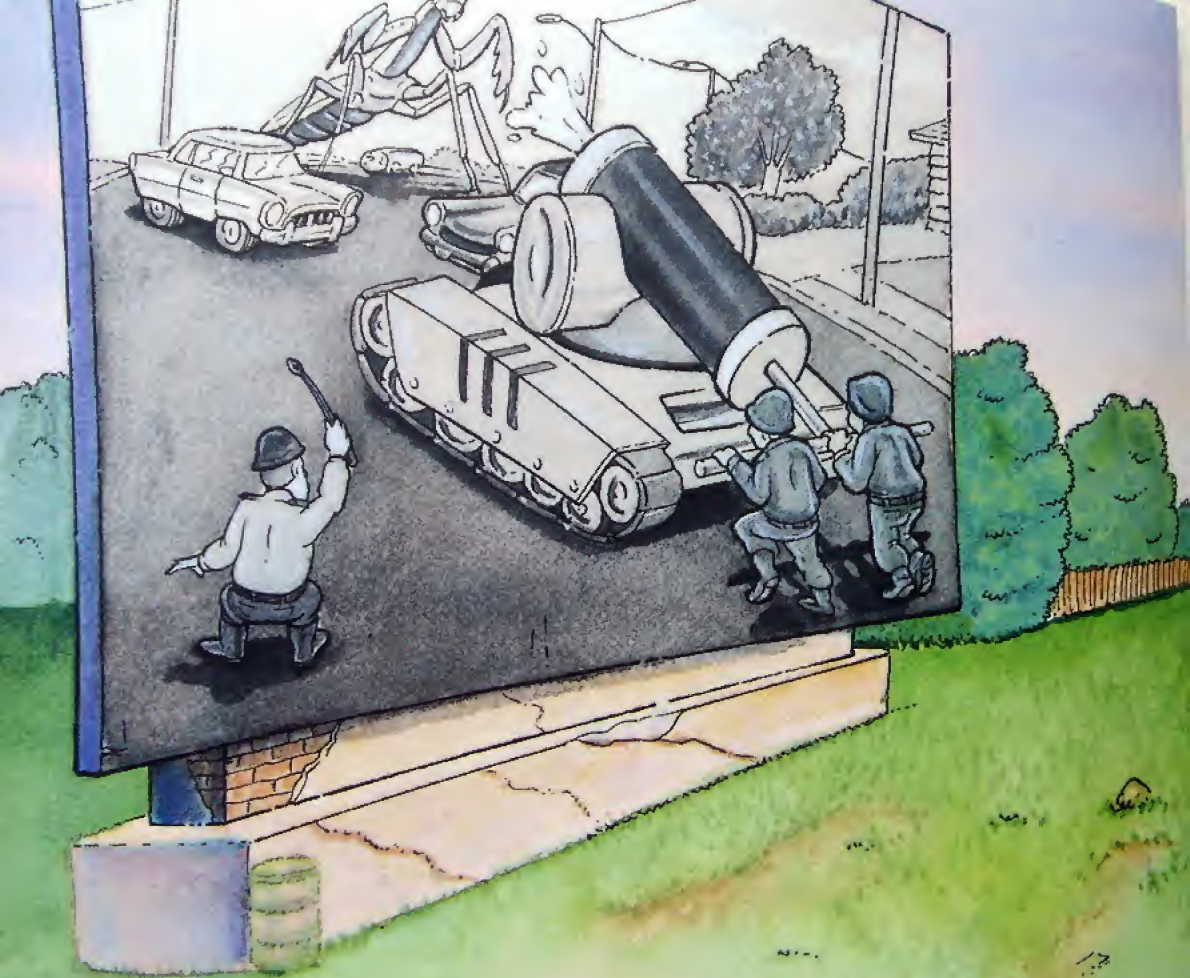
Phoebe trapped the spider in a plastic cup. "Spiders aren't insects, you know. They have eight legs and insects only have six."



The itty-bitsy spider
crawled up Carlos's back!

Get it away from me!

Popcorn, anyone?



After the Friz passed around some popcorn, we settled back to watch the movie. The army, led by General Araneus, was trying to destroy the mantis. They zapped it with bug spray.

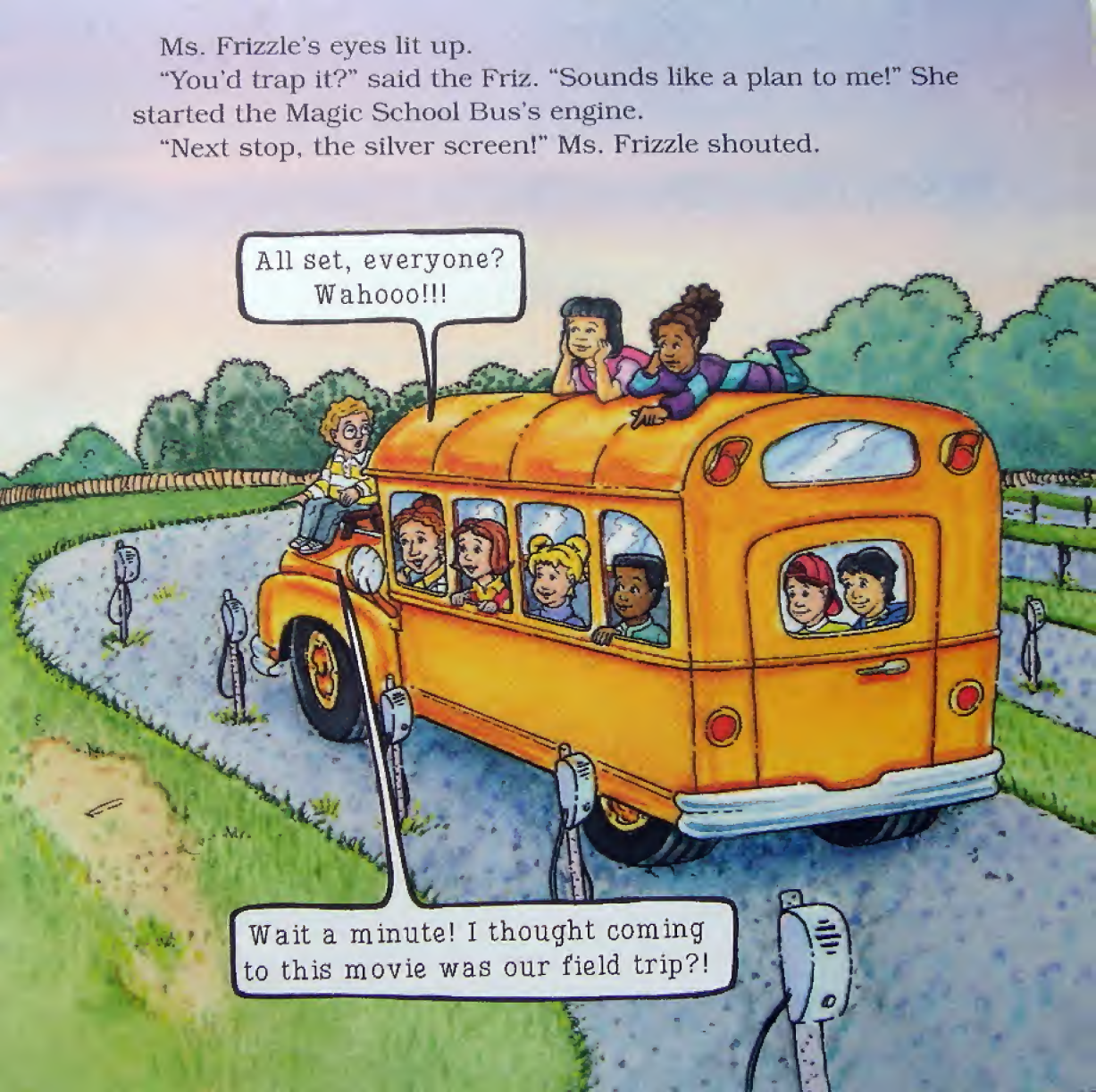
Phoebe was getting really angry.

"That was mean!" she said. "If I were in that movie, I'd trap the mantis, take it somewhere safe, and let it go."

Ms. Frizzle's eyes lit up.

"You'd trap it?" said the Friz. "Sounds like a plan to me!" She started the Magic School Bus's engine.

"Next stop, the silver screen!" Ms. Frizzle shouted.



All set, everyone?
Wahooo!!!

Wait a minute! I thought coming
to this movie was our field trip?!



*This is what I call
a drive-in movie!*

The bus lifted off of the ground. We were flying toward the movie screen! Before we knew it, we were inside the screen. We were actually part of the movie!

"We've got to stop General Araneus from hurting the mantis!" Phoebe said.

Dorothy Ann had a book about the film. "We need to find the Military Command Center."



The command center was easy to find. It looked like a giant cheeseburger. General Araneus was inside.

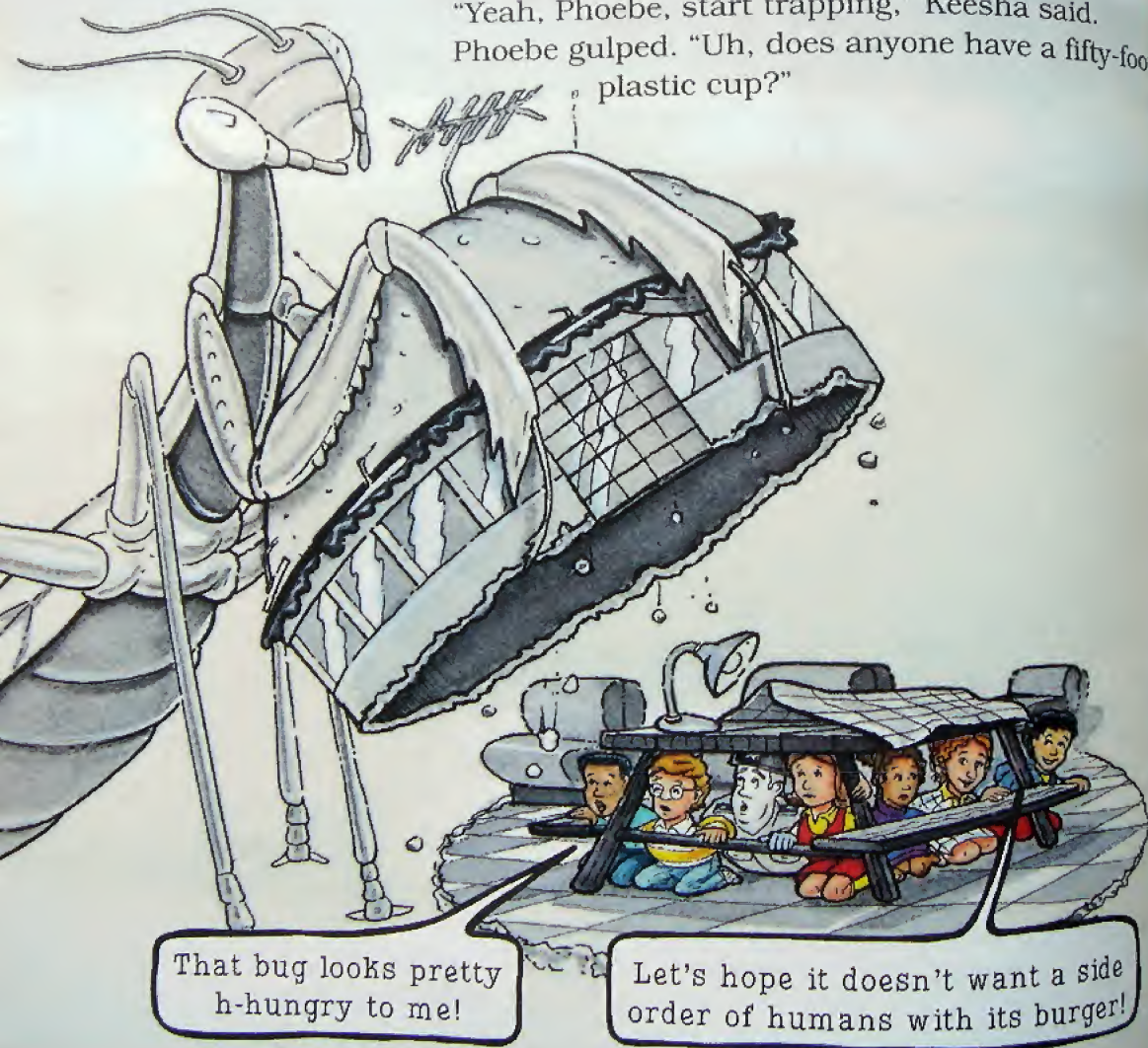
"You can't kill the praying mantis!" Phoebe begged. But the general didn't understand. "Don't worry. Of course I can kill it!" he said.

Suddenly, the command center shook. The giant praying mantis lifted it right off of the ground!

"Do something, Phoebe," Tim said.

"Yeah, Phoebe, start trapping," Keesha said.

Phoebe gulped. "Uh, does anyone have a fifty-foot plastic cup?"



That bug looks pretty h-hungry to me!

Let's hope it doesn't want a side order of humans with its burger!

There was no time to trap the mantis now. It was coming after us!

"To the bus!" Ms. Frizzle cried.

We made it to the bus just in time. General Araneus started pressing all of the bus's buttons.

A giant slide shot out of the bus. We all slid out of the bus back into the drive-in and landed on the ground. But one thing was different. We were all really small. Even smaller than a popcorn kernel.

Something else was different, too.

"Oh, no!" Dorothy Ann cried. "Liz and the bus are trapped in the movie!"



"They're not the only ones who are trapped!" Keesha said. She and Phoebe were stuck in a web! The web was attached to two speaker poles.


"It's sticky!" Phoebe said. "We can't get out."

Wanda and Ralphie pulled on the strands of the web.

"It's too strong," Wanda said.

Ms. Frizzle smiled. "We wanted to find a trapper, didn't we? Well, the best way to tap into a trapper is to get wrapped in her trap!"



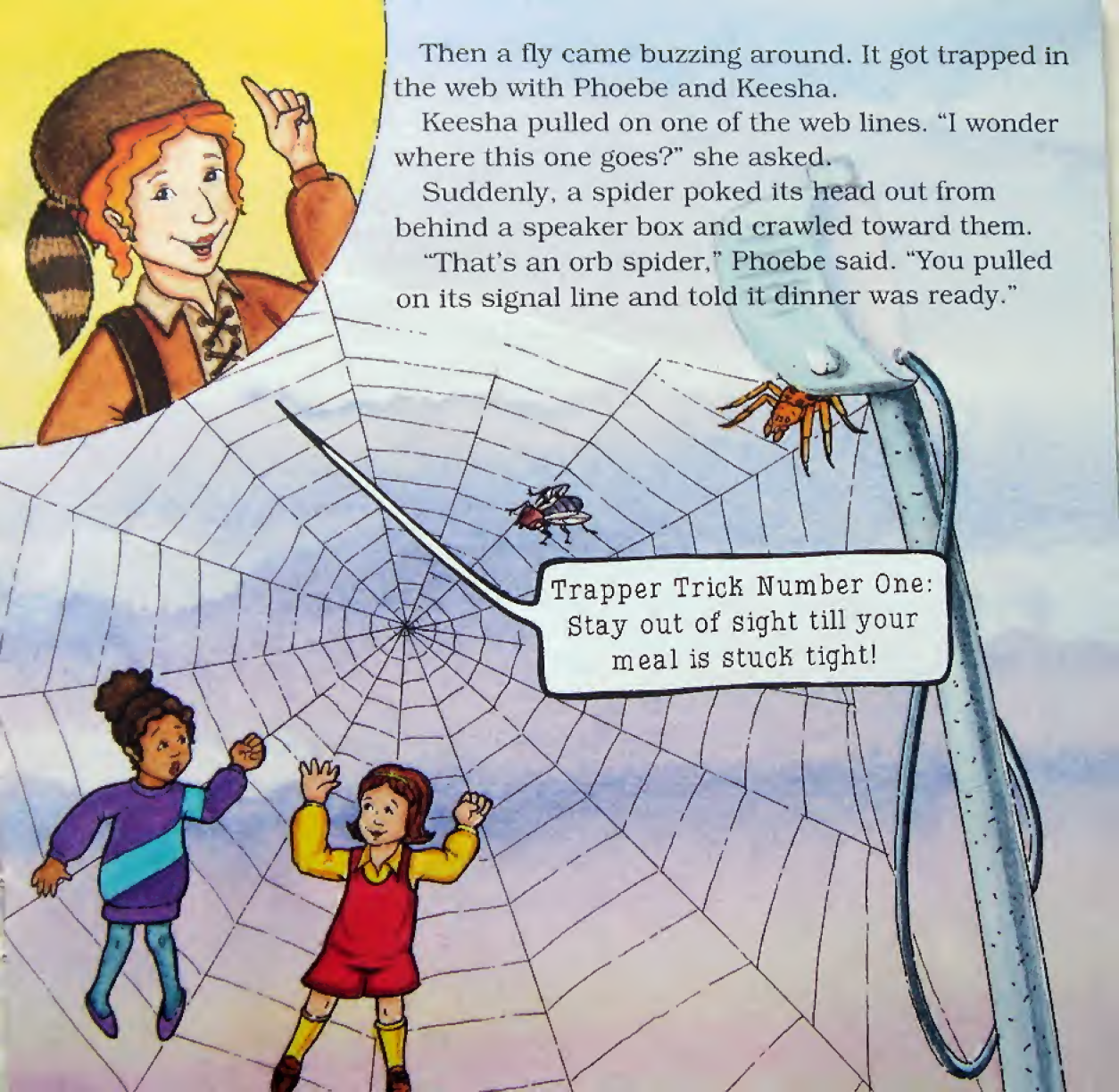


Then a fly came buzzing around. It got trapped in the web with Phoebe and Keesha.

Keesha pulled on one of the web lines. "I wonder where this one goes?" she asked.

Suddenly, a spider poked its head out from behind a speaker box and crawled toward them.

"That's an orb spider," Phoebe said. "You pulled on its signal line and told it dinner was ready."



Trapper Trick Number One:
Stay out of sight till your
meal is stuck tight!

"I don't want to be spider food!" Keesha yelled. "Help!"
Tim climbed up the pole. "I'll cut some of these anchor lines."
The Friz told us that anchor lines act just like the anchor of a ship!
They hold the web in place.

Tim cut Keesha and Phoebe free. They slid down the web to the ground.
"Phew!" Keesha said. "That spider came out of nowhere!"
"That *was* pretty amazing," Carlos said. "The web has a built-in fly alarm!"

"And some lines aren't sticky," Ralphie added. "The spider traps prey in the sticky lines, then crawls on the lines that aren't sticky so it doesn't get zapped by its own trap!"



I bet that fly wished
he'd stayed home today!

The spider that snares
the best, fares the best!

While we were walking around the drive-in, the movie was still playing. We could see that Liz was in trouble. We had to get back in the movie and help her! We ran to the screen.

But something was blocking our way.

Phoebe wasn't scared. "It's only a centipede," she said.



You'll make great
praying mantis bait!

Liiiiiz....!!!



Spiders are trappers — the best in the business!

Suddenly, a spider came out of the ground and grabbed the centipede. "Where did it go?" Ralphie asked.

Tim looked at the ground. "There's some kind of trapdoor hidden here," he said.

Ms. Frizzle nodded. "That could be why the critter who made it is called a trap-door spider."

"I get it!" Carlos said. "The trap-door spider hides in here until something juicy comes along. Then she opens the door and . . . GOTCHA!"

"It seems like there are spiders everywhere we turn," Arnold said. Dorothy Ann nodded. "According to my research, you're never more than three feet away from a spider," she said.

"We've got more trouble!" Wanda cried. "Beetle at six o'clock!"

The beetle ran after the trap-door spider. The spider crawled back into its hole and shut the door.

"The spider won't let him in," Wanda said.

"I wouldn't let him in, either," Arnold added.



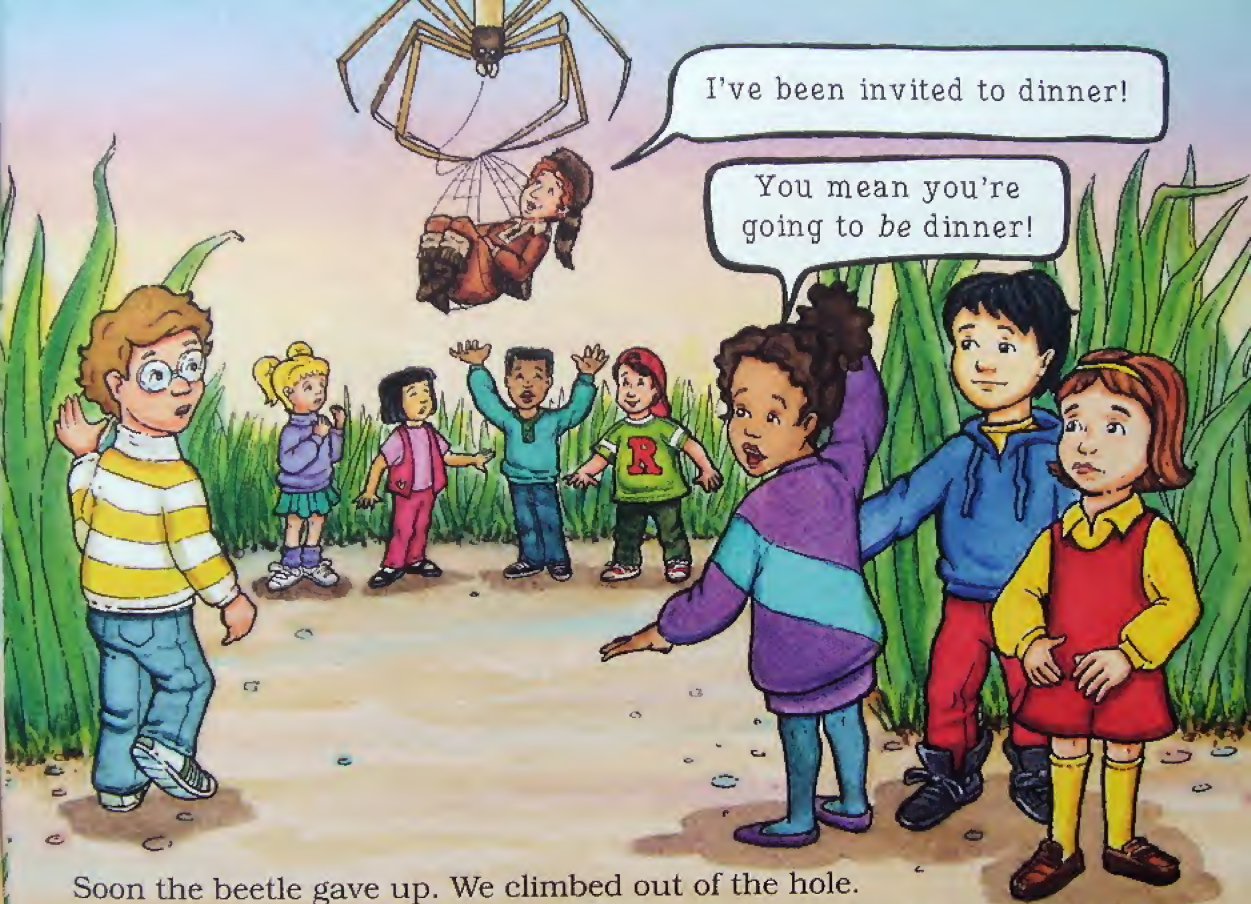
The beetle couldn't get to the spider, so it started running after us. We ran as fast as we could. Keesha spotted another trapdoor. "In here!" Keesha yelled.

We ran down into the hole. Ms. Frizzle shut the trapdoor tight. The beetle pulled and thumped, but it couldn't get in.

"This sure is a nice, safe place to hide," Wanda said.



Trapper Trick
Number Two:
The trapper that
knows when to
run and hide
lives to trap
another day!

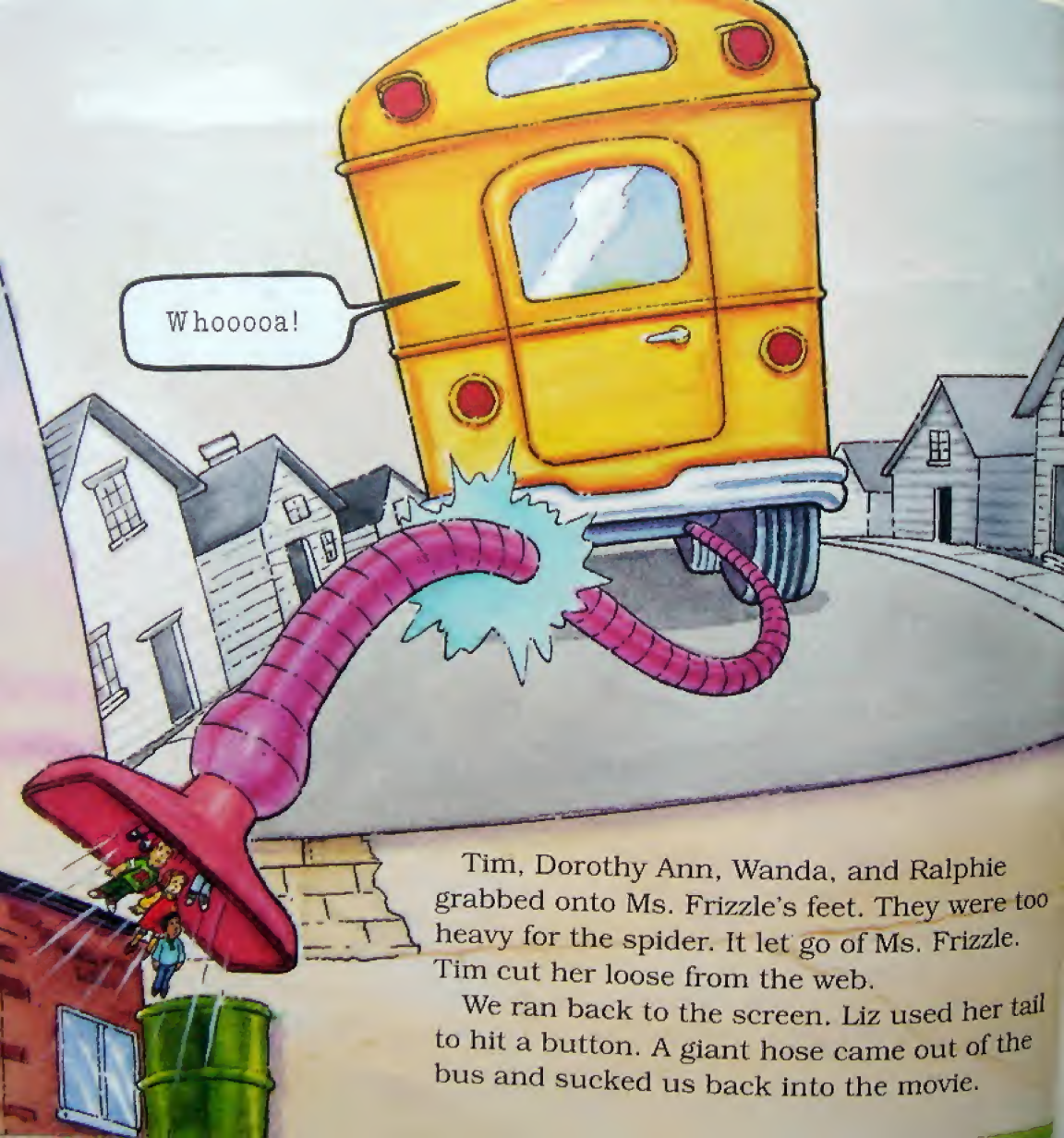


I've been invited to dinner!

You mean you're going to be dinner!

Soon the beetle gave up. We climbed out of the hole.
"Let's go!" Phoebe cried. "We've got to get back into the movie and help Liz!"
We all ran to the screen — except for Ms. Frizzle. She was caught in another trap! A spider was hanging upside down from a tree. It was holding onto a web shaped like a pouch — and Ms. Frizzle was trapped inside.
"Say hello to the dinopis spider — trapper extraordinaire!" Ms. Frizzle said. "She doesn't wait for the food to come to her trap — she takes her trap to the food."

The dinopis spider lifted Ms. Frizzle off of the ground.



Whooooa!

Tim, Dorothy Ann, Wanda, and Ralphie grabbed onto Ms. Frizzle's feet. They were too heavy for the spider. It let go of Ms. Frizzle. Tim cut her loose from the web.

We ran back to the screen. Liz used her tail to hit a button. A giant hose came out of the bus and sucked us back into the movie.

We were too late. General Araneus grabbed Liz and drove off in a pizza delivery car. He was going to use Liz to catch the praying mantis.

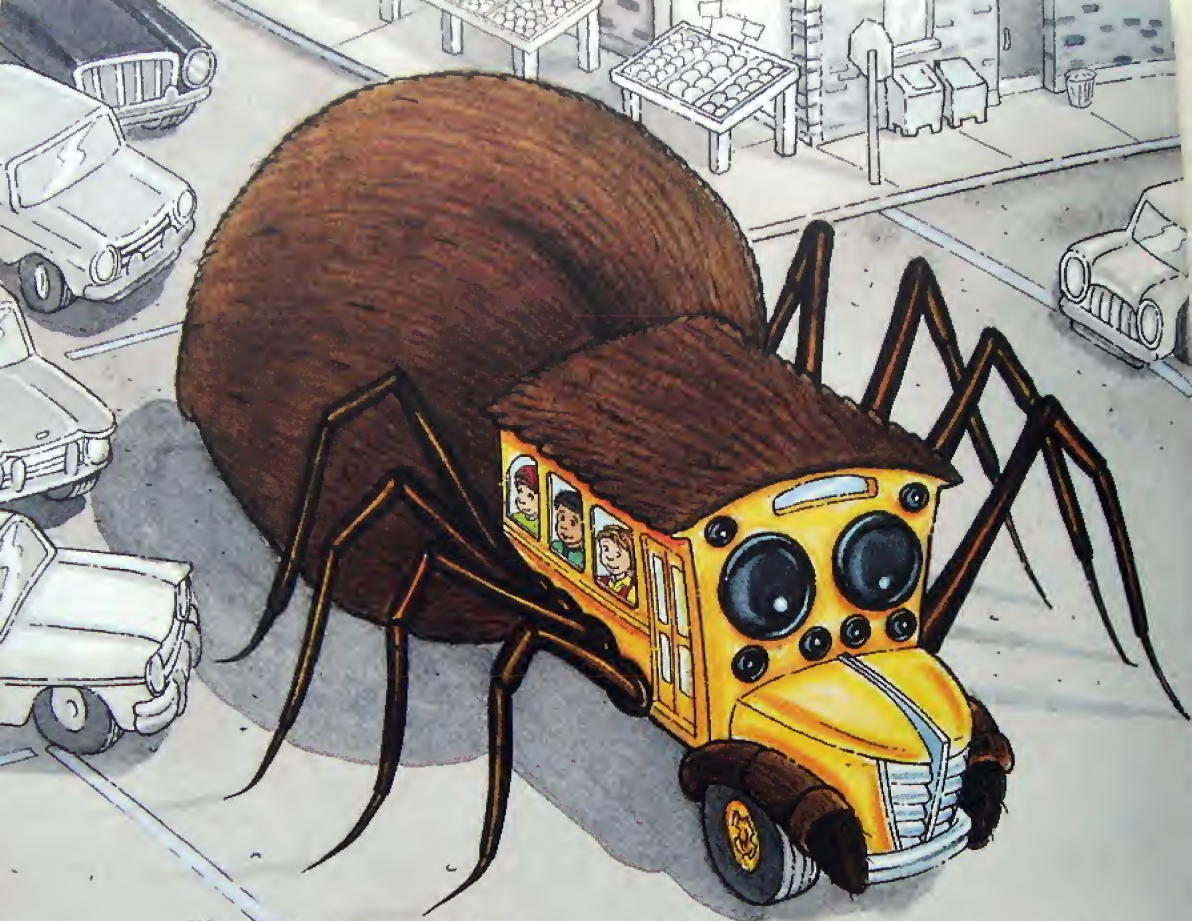
"We've got to stop General Araneus before he gets to the mantis," Wanda said.

"Only a giant spider could trap that general," Arnold said.

Phoebe's eyes lit up. "Arnold, that's a great idea. Isn't it, Ms. Frizzle?"

Ms. Frizzle nodded. "Come on, bus, do your stuff!"





The Friz pressed a button, and the bus started turning into a giant spider!

"Eight legs?" Ms. Frizzle asked.

"Check!" Phoebe said.

"Spider's silk spinners?" Ms. Frizzle asked.

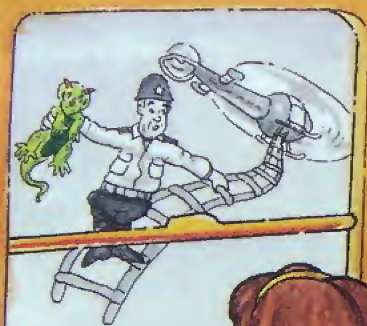
"Check!" Phoebe said.

"Then buckle up, class," said Ms. Frizzle. "Trapping season has just begun!"

We hid the bus in the ground, under a trapdoor. When we heard the general's car speed by, we made our move. But the general got away.

Wanda scratched her head. "Why didn't it work? For prey on the ground, use a trap on the ground."


Phoebe pointed to the sky where the general escaped in a helicopter. "Except our prey wasn't on the ground," she said. "We'll have to try again!"



What did we learn
from this?

Never order mushrooms and
anchovies on the same pizza?





I think I'm going to be sick.

"To trap prey in the air, we need a spiderweb," Phoebe said.
"Prepare Operation Orb Spiderbus!" Ms. Frizzle cried.
We used one of our silk spinners to spin a web between two trees.
"First, the radial lines," Ms. Friz ordered.
"Those are straight lines that form rows," Phoebe explained. "The other lines are woven between them."
Then we wove web lines through the radial lines in a spiral shape. Finally, we switched spinners and used sticky threads to spin a spiral in the center of the web.



We finished the web just in time. It worked! General Araneus got stuck on the sticky web strands.

But not for long. He jumped out of his shoes and slid onto a strand that wasn't sticky.

"He's getting away!" Phoebe yelled.

"Forget trapping the general," Phoebe said. "Our only chance to save Liz now is to trap the mantis!"

"But the mantis is too big for a trapdoor!" Tim said.

"And we can't wait for it to fly into our web!" Dorothy Ann added.

While we were figuring out what to do, Ms. Frizzle was singing, "Someone's in the kitchen with dino . . . someone's in the kitchen with dinopis . . ."

"That's it!" Phoebe said. "Prepare Operation Dinopis Spider!"





General Araneus tied up Liz inside a giant bug trap. The mantis was about to take the bait. We had to act fast. We hung from the branch of a nearby tree. Then we spun our web.

"Now!" Phoebe yelled.

We dropped the web onto the mantis. We trapped its head!

We made more silk, faster and faster, until the praying mantis was completely covered.

Phoebe stood up. "I hereby declare this mantis trapped!"

General Araneus was the only one who wasn't happy. "I want my bait!" he screamed.

"Sorry, Liz belongs with us," Wanda said.

"But here's something you can have," Ralphie said.



Ralphie sprung the general's bug trap. The general was trapped in his own trap!

"Good work, class!" Ms. Frizzle said. "Let's get out of here."

Liz climbed into the bus and turned the key. The bus changed back into its normal size. The praying mantis was normal-sized, too. We hopped in the bus and drove out of the movie screen.



"So, Carlos, are you still scared of spiders?" Phoebe asked as Ms. Frizzle drove us back to school.

"No way!" Carlos said. "The way they use their traps to stay safe while they catch their prey — it's too much."

Ms. Frizzle smiled. "Well, as my great-uncle Arachnid used to say, 'There's nothing like a spider to teach you everything you need to know.'"

"Or is there?" Phoebe wondered. "Who knows what we'll learn on our next field trip!"



General Araneus Visits the Set

Producer: Araneus! What are you doing here?

Araneus: My agent told me this story was supposed to be about spiders — ALL spiders, but you just showed three!

Producer: We focused on the orb, trap-door, and dinopis spiders because the kinds of traps they make were important to the story.

Araneus: Understood, but there are more than a hundred thousand different kinds of spiders and hundreds of ways they hunt and trap. In fact, although most spiders make silk, only some of them spin webs.

Producer: We know that — and we showed as much as we could while still giving YOU as much screen time as possible.

Araneus: I certainly agree with that. But spinning a web can take hours — you had it happening in minutes!

Producer: Well, we could have taken more time on the webs, but that would have meant cutting back YOUR role.

Araneus: Cutting back MY role...? I think you made the right decision. Keep up the good work, soldier! Good-bye.

Producer: I'm glad I got out of that sticky situation!





Spider Search A Project for Parents and Kids

Scientists say that you're usually never more than three feet away from a spider! Why not go on a spider search in your home and neighborhood to see which spiders live near you? Here are some common spiders you will probably run into:

- Orb spiders: These spiders make their orb-shaped webs in gardens and other outdoor areas.
- Tangled-web spiders: These spiders make their tangled, messy-looking webs in cellars, attics, and other dark places.
- Daddy longlegs: These creatures might look like spiders, but they're just really close relatives. They're in the same family, called arachnids. Daddy longlegs don't spin webs. They eat leaves, grass, and insects that are already dead. You'll probably find them outdoors.

If you see a spider, don't touch it — but don't be afraid, either. Most spiders aren't dangerous to humans. In fact, they're important to the planet because they eat millions of harmful insects.

Ms. Frizzle